The Voice of the Baby Boomers
Changing the workplace for the future

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Acknowledgments

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p.4</td>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.7</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.12</td>
<td>Method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.16</td>
<td>Results and Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.17</td>
<td>Changes in Baby Boomer Priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.24</td>
<td>The Value of Baby Boomers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.29</td>
<td>Context: Environmental Influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.35</td>
<td>Context: Organizational Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.40</td>
<td>Drivers of Baby Boomer Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.45</td>
<td>Working with Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.48</td>
<td>Review and Recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.57</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.59</td>
<td>Appendix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.59</td>
<td>Demographic summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.60</td>
<td>Summary of Statistics on Human Financial Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p.62</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Executive summary
In the last five years the age demographic of the workforce has changed dramatically. Due to employment law and economic shifts, the over 50s (Baby Boomer) generation has grown to a third of the workforce in Western society and will continue to increase. Yet the business world has yet to wake up and engage with this shift. The HR focus is on developing younger employees. The publicly stoic and mature generation has certain needs which differ from those of their young colleagues and from current corporate policy. They also possess vast experience, knowledge and interpersonal skills which have true value to employers, but are not sufficiently recognized and rewarded.

This research surveyed 1810 people using an online survey and conducted in-depth telephone interviews and focus groups with 186 Baby Boomers (those born in the year 1966 or before). It highlights the challenges facing this ‘hidden generation’ and the organizations and communities in which it works. It builds on a previous Baby Boomer project conducted in 2015 and, via anonymous input, explores more deeply the wants and needs of Baby Boomers in the workplace. The interviewees in this project ranged from self-employed to those who were part of global blue chip organizations. Despite this diversity they still had remarkably similar attitudes and beliefs about their future working lives over the next 20 years.

The findings highlight a need to revisit corporate strategy and culture, examining in particular new working patterns, job types and rewards.

Key findings

• Experience of this generation is undervalued and not fully utilized. Many Baby Boomers feel they are sustaining their jobs, but not fulfilling their ambitions, exhibiting lower levels of engagement, which in turn has an impact on both themselves and those around them.
• Baby Boomers experience age bias in recruitment and development.
• If Baby Boomers could change one thing about their working lives it would be to have more time and flexibility.

• Baby Boomers’ high level priorities are Relationships, Good health and Motivation. More detailed priorities include Happiness, Fulfilment and Developing others.
• Baby Boomers within different business sectors have different top priorities:
  • Hospitality Sector: Motivation and Health
  • Education Sector: Giving Back
  • Finance Sector: Health
  • Professional Sector: Relationships with others.
Executive summary

This research is important for:

- **Strategic workforce planning.** The nature and character of the workforce has and will continue to change. Businesses aiming for a proactive people strategy must evolve now in preparation for the new workforce demographics, namely the skills gap, changing career patterns and expectations, and crucially, ageing. Now is the time to examine the alignment of the workforce against future business strategy, to understand talent needs and areas in need of improvement. Acknowledging the age profile when engaging the workforce is not only a necessity, but ultimately a beneficial strategy decision.

- **Diversity and Creativity.** Many of our participants felt that age could reasonably be viewed through the Diversity lens. Obviously, it follows that along with a diverse workforce must come creative, flexible management and leadership. Today many organizations are tailoring the workspace and culture of the organization towards attracting young talent. Businesses are self-sabotaging by cutting themselves off from attracting the wisdom, people management, experience and knowledge that seasoned professionals possess.

- **Those seeking to increase employee engagement.** Events, benefits packages, well-being programmes, coaching and employee feedback schemes are a number of things employers can do to increase the engagement of their staff. However, our interviews show that engagement and motivation at work was primarily down to positive working relationships and support of colleagues.

Application

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The data highlights that the working world is changing. Fair and considerate treatment for all, listening to the ideas of experienced Baby Boomers, and driving change in human resource management are important globally, and critical to review as soon as possible.

Key findings (cont.)

- Safe spaces for conversations about career development and planning are necessary to support this generation. Baby Boomers are often reluctant to discuss their needs and ambitions for fear of career-limiting consequences.

- Line managers are often not equipped to handle HR responsibilities. The role of line managers as HR representatives comes under criticism due to lack of time and ability to focus on the human side of working.

- Baby Boomers want a different kind of development. A large number seek mentoring/coaching/advisory roles. Many want a gradual reduction in work hours, and variety in their work with greater opportunities to ‘give back’. Others want opportunities to continue to develop on a fast track.

- There is a need to think creatively about intergenerational working. Baby Boomers show great alliance with Generation Y, the youngest generation in the workplace. There is huge potential to develop a high functioning multigenerational future workforce.
Introduction
Three generations make up the majority of today’s workforce, Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers. For the purposes of this research we have defined Baby Boomers as over 50 year olds and Gen Y as aged 30 and under. In recent years there has been an increased focus on those over 50 in the workplace. Demographic changes in the last century, particularly increased longevity, have prompted longer working lives. In addition, governmental pension changes, financial recessions and increased living costs have forced many people to stay in work longer than originally planned.

In 2015, there were 901 million people aged 60 or over, comprising 12 per cent of the global population. This age group is growing at a rate of 3.26 % per year. Currently, Europe has the greatest percentage of its population aged 60 or over (24 per cent), but population ageing is occurring globally. By 2050, all major areas of the world except Africa will have nearly a quarter or more of their populations aged over 60. In 1992 in the UK one in five people in employment was aged over 50, today it is more than one in four.

Over time working into the eighth decade will become the norm, but for the next 10 years or so, a whole generation of people, and their employers have been hit by a fundamental shift in the working pattern. The corporate world has, by and large, not caught up with the impact of these changes and needs to re-examine the motivation, productivity and wellbeing of its older workforce.

Other research has identified this shift and discusses its implications for businesses around the globe. Research by Opinium found that “perceptions of opportunity appear to diminish as workers get older. While close to three-quarters (70%) of employees aged between 18 and 34 see opportunities for progression in their current roles, this figure falls to 37% amongst those aged 55 or over. Employers must be sure to provide further opportunities for these staff, particularly as the workforce ages.” Similarly, the CIPD identify a need to foster an “inclusive and age-diverse culture” by tailoring HR solutions for this age group whilst acknowledging that assumptions and generalizations about older workers are inaccurate and unhelpful.

“I was asked if I wanted to be considered for an executive role. I said: ‘I will decline, because I don’t think it’s the role that advances me, but I’d be happy to help whoever goes into that role.’ I don’t think we do enough thinking about bringing bright people in, but putting some experience next to them.”

- Manufacturing Manager
Introduction

Ashridge Executive Education has conducted research on the intergenerational workplace since 2008. Since then, we have gathered over 9000 survey responses and conducted interviews and focus groups with over 1000 individuals from different generations, business sectors and global locations.

The research investigates:

- Is each generation actually different from others?
- What has made each generation the way it is?
- What does each generation want from work? What motivates people to succeed at different stages in their lives?
- Where are the conflicts and issues between generations?
- What are the global cultural differences?
- What are the appropriate ways of working with and developing each generation?
- In which ways do organizations need to respond to changing workforce demographics?

Ashridge Executive Education has published six reports on this subject. They can be accessed at: www.ashridge.org.uk/GenYResearch. These reports include:

- **Generation Y: Inside Out (2009)**
  - this report sets the scene by investigating the myths and realities of perception of Gen Y and their managers. It challenges the popular press and requires people to reflect on their own prejudices and perceptions of others. It also documents key areas for development for Gen Y at work.

- **Generation Y: Great Expectations (2011)**
  - this report contains research conducted jointly with the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM). The findings focus on recruitment and the first five years at work. The report highlights the realities of the modern workforce and how organizations must adapt. It allows those from education, HR and line management to understand how to motivate and encourage young people at work.

- **Culture Shock: Generation Y around the World (2012)**
  - this report builds on the ILM research conducted in 2011 by looking at cultural differences and similarities across the globe.

- **The Millennial Compass: Truths about the 30-and-under Generation in the Workplace (2014)**
  - this report contains global research conducted for the MSL Group into Millennials' attitudes and expectation in the workplace.

- **A New Generation: The Success of Generation Y in GCC Countries (2015)**
  - this research project examines the similarities and differences in Gen Y employees across the six Gulf Cooperation Council Countries in the Middle East, and compares this population to Gen Y in other parts of the world. It also looks at the relationships between GCC local Gen Y employees and their local and expatriate managers.

The sixth of these reports moved on from a Gen Y focus to explore the older generation of workers, those over the age of 50. The first phase of this research was presented in the report: **Don’t Put Baby (Boomers) in the Corner: Realizing the Potential of the Over 50s at Work (2015)**.
Introduction

Baby Boomer Phase I Research Summary

Research aims
The aims of this project were to build upon the previous research into Gen Y, and extend it to cover the over 50s in the workplace. Specifically, this research sought to examine what the older generation ‘gets’ from working longer (their personal wants and needs) and what they ‘give’ back – their contribution of wisdom knowledge, experience and insight to younger colleagues. In order to obtain this insight, a UK-focused online survey collected quantitative data from two groups of participants:
1. Those aged over 50, working or recently retired.
2. HR staff of any age, working in an organization that employs over 50 year olds.

Survey Topics
The survey topics were based on the relevant existing literature and our previous research findings. Using a variety of question formats the survey explored:
• What the over 50s get from work
• What the over 50s can give back to work
• Training and Development for the over 50s
• Examples of successful knowledge sharing activities between generations
• Challenges faced by organizations in attracting and motivating the over 50s
• The role of the over 50s in an organization
• Personal wants/needs and how they fit into work wants/needs

A total of 2045 participants responded to the survey. After data cleaning the final set of data used in analysis was 1834. This total comprised 1426 participants aged 50 years and over and 408 HR staff. The majority of the participants worked in the UK.
Key Findings

• **Baby Boomers, despite being ambitious, are not used to their full potential.** Results showed the highest instances of unused skills involved “developing others” and “strategic skills”. Many felt restricted in operational roles and sensed they were perceived as ‘old’.

• **Baby Boomers are driven by intrinsic needs.** The top four factors rated as ‘very important’ by Baby Boomers in their working lives were “mental stimulation”, “fulfilment”, “a sense of purpose” and “pride”. Leaving a legacy was also highly important to Baby Boomers.

• **Sticking to the status quo can have negative consequences for the individual and organization.** Data showed some Baby Boomers feel a reluctance to adapt and that often the same is true of organizations. For example, findings highlighted a lack of thought about knowledge transfer before retirement.

• **Baby Boomers want something different.** Many of the Baby Boomers in this sample wanted new challenges. Common desired career moves included becoming a coach/mentor, board member, strategic advisor or to work in relationship building.

• **HR is off target.** Mismatches were found between HR’s perspectives of Baby Boomers, and the perspectives of Baby Boomers themselves. HR focused on retirement planning whereas Baby Boomers often seek development. Formal career discussions make Baby Boomers feel they are put into a ‘corner’.

The quantitative results from this research enabled a mapping of broad themes and perspectives which highlighted the necessity of organizational change to accommodate the growing cohort of Baby Boomer workers. In order to be more specific about the kinds of changes necessary, particularly when acknowledging the fact that Baby Boomers are a generation of individuals, the next phase of the research was planned to obtain more detail about their attitudes, motivations and priorities.

Current Research

This current report presents the findings from the next stage of this project – a qualitative investigation of Baby Boomer perspectives. This second phase of research on the over 50s took place between September 2015 and September 2016. The aim of this phase was to delve more deeply into the subject of Baby Boomer motivations, challenges and views of working life. As such the following findings add depth to the existing report by collecting complementary qualitative data.
Method
Method

The interviews and focus groups were designed to gain insight into the perspectives and motivations of employees over the age of 50. The sessions were semi-structured. Key themes identified in the previous report were examined further and included:

- Changes in the nature of work and the working environment
- Individual motivations and challenges felt in the workplace, both positive and negative
- How they feel their organization views and treats them
- What organizations are doing well/could do better
- Thoughts about the future

46 one-to-one telephone interviews were conducted in total, the length of interviews ranged from 20 to 70 minutes. 18 focus groups were carried out with organizations from a variety of sectors. Each session lasted approximately 1 hour and the number of participants ranged from 4 to 23. Prior to interviews and focus group sessions, participants provided their informed consent and were made aware of their right to withdraw from the research at any time. Participating organizations were recruited via existing business networks of contacts, social media and personal contacts.

Qualitative data was collected from 194 participants collectively. Participants were given access to the research results prior to publishing.

“I worked full-time for five years after 65. I’ve only been part-time for a couple of years.”

- Warehouse Co-Ordinator, aged over 70
Quantitative data collection

Quantitative data was collected through an online and hard copy survey. The largest samples came from the hospitality, education, finance and professional sectors. The survey was rolled out across all generations whilst the interviews and focus groups consisted of those over the age of 50.

An email invitation with a link to the anonymous survey was sent to the Ashridge Executive Education Network of contacts. The survey link was also placed on the Ashridge Executive Education website, social networking sites and distributed via personal contacts.

Survey sample

The final survey sample after data cleaning was 1810 after hard copy and online responses were combined. The sample consisted of mainly 50+ year olds (46%), followed by Gen X (33%) and Gen Y (21%). The majority of participants were female (59%). Full sample details can be found in the Appendix.

The survey topics were based on the relevant existing literature and previous research. Participants were asked to choose their three most important priorities and rank them in order, one being most important and three being least important. Broader high level priorities were displayed first. They included ‘Exploration/Creativity’ and ‘Relationships with others.’ Next, 28 more detailed priorities were displayed for respondents to rank, for example ‘Learning something new’ or ‘Happiness laughter and fun.’

Finally, we asked the question: “If you could change one thing about your working life, describe what you would change and the effect this change would have on your life.”
Qualitative data was analysed thematically. Focus group and interview transcripts were analysed separately initially, then aggregated as common themes emerged. Data was coded and then clustered into themes based on prevalence. Other less frequent themes have also been included where they provide unique insight. In addition, immediately after each interview session, notes were made on the key themes discussed and on the differences in content compared to previous sessions. When interpreting the findings, it is important to remember that results describe individuals’ attitudes and perceptions found within our sample; they give an indication of wider attitudes but cannot be generalised.

The quantitative data from the survey was cleaned then analysed using descriptive statistics to compare demographic variables – geography, business sector, gender and age group. Only those categories with sufficient sample size (see Appendix for details) were further analysed. Where percentages do not add up to 100% it is caused by multiple answers, computer rounding and/or the exclusion of neutral “don’t know” or missing data.

The last question from the survey was an open question which asked participants: “If you could change one thing about your working life, describe what you would change and the effect it would have on your life”. The responses were aggregated and a thematic analysis coded them into one of 21 different categories. During analysis it was decided to focus on only the desired change as there was insufficient data for the ‘effect’ part of the answers.
Results and discussion
Results and discussion

Background to results

“How are you protecting your brand? How are you protecting your investment in people?”
- UK Consultant

The data from this research was comprehensive and authentic, having been collected in a neutral and confidential environment. The interviews with Baby Boomers allowed them to express their opinions and experience of working life in more detail compared to the survey conducted in the first phase of this research. The results affirm and support all of the findings from the previous intergenerational research report as well as revealing new insights uncovered in this second phase.

The results from the project have been divided into six key themes, encompassing both the survey questions and the interview data. The themes concern: the needs and priorities of Baby Boomers; the value of this generation and recognition of their contribution; putting Baby Boomer behavior and needs into the environmental context; the impact of corporate culture; the emotional drivers of Baby Boomer behavior and the interaction of the over 50s with their line managers and younger colleagues.

1. Changes in Baby Boomer Priorities

The new age of portfolio careers, driven by Gen Y seeking fulfilment at the start of their careers and Baby Boomers wanting more from their working lives, highlights the risk associated with taking more experienced workers for granted. In a previous report we found Generation Y to be less loyal to their employers, but older workers are now following suit. Experienced employees now need a reason to stay when retirement is a less accessible option. It is therefore important to understand the priorities of Baby Boomers at work.

The previous Ashridge Executive Education Baby Boomer research highlighted that Baby Boomers are intrinsically driven individuals. This generation has also been raised to regard work as a major component of life, dominating personal priorities and approaches to life.

The survey and interview results described in this section cover the priorities of working Baby Boomers and how they are changing. The important themes discovered are: relationships with others at work; health; motivation; knowledge sharing; and the use of time.

“Affiliation and working with people. That’s what I know gives me energy.”
- Manufacturing Manager
The survey results describing personal priorities revealed that overall ‘relationship with others’ was most important to all age groups; ‘being motivated’ came second and ‘health’ third. However, there were some differences by age group, revealing that there are different priorities for different generations of the working population (Figure 1).

Key Priorities for Baby Boomers

“'Older worker' at 50? The window between getting a master's degree at 25 and retiring at 70 means 50 is only halfway through the journey! So stretch your mind, body, and imagination and if your company does not want to invest in you, move on, at any age!”

- Logistics HR Executive

Key findings

The key findings from both the interviews and survey are:

- Baby Boomers value relationships with others at work (56%), then prioritize their health (54%) and motivation (51%). ‘Achievement’ is much less important (27%)
- ‘Sharing wisdom’ (14%) and ‘developing others’ (14%) are much more important to Baby Boomers than to Gen Y (3% and 4% respectively). ‘Giving back’ is a strong driver of Baby Boomers (41%) compared to Gen Y (21%).

Priorities by Generation (% ranked in top 3 at high level)

Figure 1: High level priorities by generation, % ranked in top 3 choices, selected from 7 items
Health becomes increasingly important with age with nearly 36% nominating it as a top 3 choice in Generation Y, compared to 54% of Baby Boomers. This finding was echoed by the verbal comments given by those who filled in the survey at focus groups. A common observation by those in their fifties was:

“I never thought I would rate health as important to me until the last few years.”
· UK Focus Group Participant

The other priority that rises with age is ‘giving back to others’, with 21.5% of Gen Y nominating it as a top 3 priority, but scoring over 41% in the Baby Boomer group.

The most dramatic change in the other direction was for ‘sense of achievement’. Nearly 27% of Baby Boomers selected it as a priority compared to 49% of Gen Y. Baby Boomers feel less of a need to achieve big goals compared to their younger work colleagues.

Looking at the more detailed options from the survey, the following items came up with statistically significant differences between the age groups (Figure 2):

**Priorities by Generation (% ranked in top 3 at detailed level)**

![Graph showing detailed priorities by generation, % ranked in top 3 choices, selected from 28 items](Figure 2: Detailed priorities by generation, % ranked in top 3 choices, selected from 28 items)
‘Happiness’ came first in all age groups. ‘A sense of fulfilment’ was second. ‘Happiness’ still diminished with age as a priority as did ‘career progression’ and ‘financial rewards’. ‘Sharing wisdom’ and ‘developing others’ became higher priorities in Baby Boomers, who seem to gain much satisfaction from bringing on others in the workplace.

The results from the interviews confirm the survey findings, showing that intrinsic and emotional items such as happiness, relationships with others and fulfilment are very important to Baby Boomers at work. Consistently, the interviewees described how the interaction with work colleagues was one of their main motivators in life.

The interviews indicated that as a group, Baby Boomers are keen to work hard, develop younger people and want to give back to colleagues and their communities through their accumulated expertise. The challenge to them is managing their overall time – balancing work and life, as described later in this section.

An interesting finding from the research interviews is that a number of the Baby Boomers are starting their own businesses, returning to education to retrain or moving into the charity sector. Other interviewees in full time employment are looking for alternative opportunities without telling their current employers. Baby Boomers are now taking action based on their priorities in life.

If I could change one thing...

The last question in the survey asked the respondents to consider which one thing they would change in their working lives.

Key finding

- Time and work-life balance comments were the most frequent (29%) in terms of what Baby Boomers would change about their working lives.

As this section of the survey was an open question, all responses are of high value. However, the 21 aggregated categories of responses are grouped here (Table 1) into four frequency groups for ease of analysis.
Results and discussion

For Baby Boomers ‘Time/work-life balance’ was unsurprisingly the most sought-after change, accounting for 29% of all comments.

“I would slow things down and give everyone the time to really think through how existing capabilities can be leveraged into new markets or solutions. Unfortunately business seems driven by ‘the fear of missing out’ so everything is done with lots of gusto but little creativity or insight. I suspect everyone would then have a true sense of accomplishment vs. a sense of completion.”

- North American Communications/Media Respondent

‘Flexibility’ was high at 11% and was mainly associated with working from home.

“I am very lucky in that my boss gives me the flexibility to able to work from home one or two days a week and agrees that we can work compressed hours. However, that feels like a ‘favour’. It would be good to have this flexibility without feeling like that constrains your opportunities for career progression.”

- UK Finance and Insurance Respondent

The change categories in the second ‘medium’ group appeared with equal frequency at 5-6%. In Baby Boomers ‘Autonomy/Influence/Control’ tended to describe the ability to step back and take a broader look at the organization as a whole, with a view to influencing strategy and longer term plans.

“Being able to engage in some real and sustained strategic planning rather than always seeming to be engaged in tactical level firefighting would be a breath of fresh air!!”

- UK Oil Gas Industry Respondent

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<th>Priority</th>
<th>Change Category</th>
<th>Baby Boomer % of responses</th>
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<tr>
<td>Highest</td>
<td>Time/work-life balance</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Influence/control/autonomy</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfaction &amp; fulfilment</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No change wanted</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Resources &amp; support</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fair recognition</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stimulation &amp; challenge</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wind down/career break/retire</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (2% or less)</td>
<td>Personal feelings, Humanitarian impact, Juggling time, Health, Salary, Direction &amp; focus, Developing others, Progression, Security, Keep working</td>
<td>4%</td>
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The need for more ‘Satisfaction and Fulfilment’ focused on the desire for work which was more aligned with personal values. In the ‘Efficiency’ category Baby Boomers felt too much time was taken up in admin as opposed to tangible output, more so than other age groups. The ‘People’ category included things like better management, trust in colleagues, team spirit, more equitable gender balance in leadership and more face to face contact with colleagues.

The majority of Baby Boomers who sought no change in their working lives had either made changes that satisfied them or, where they could see an end to their employment, it was generally the case that they did not desire any particular changes.

From both the survey and the interviews, ‘time’ came out as a key priority for Baby Boomers and one that required deeper analysis.

“‘You value the quality of things, time, and life experiences. Friends and family become more significant. It’s different.’”
— Energy Company Manager

The key findings derived from both the survey and interviews are:

- Time is an important priority for Baby Boomers with 30% wishing they could reduce working hours and a total of 39% wanting more agile working and a reduction in commuting time
- Females regard non-work time as important as they are often carers for others
- Baby Boomers are calling for a new model of work/non-work time integration.

The research has reinforced that careers and working patterns have changed. People are motivated differently from the past, driven by work-life balance requirements and changing personal obligations. However, the interviewees claim that there has been proportionally less adjustment in the corporate world to these shifts.

The theme of ‘time’ encompassed the following categories based on the open question results (Figure 3):
Results and discussion

The largest requirement (30%) was for a reduction in working hours. Many respondents said they would prefer home working to avoid commuting time (23%). ‘Family time’ (17%) included caring responsibilities for children and elderly relatives. Flexibility and agile working was called for by 16% and was often followed by an assertion of increased productivity. ‘Time management’ describes the desire to have more control over the utilization of time available, with non-productive activities such as emails and meetings being cited. The ‘more hours in the day’ category was linked to the desire for more “thinking time” which was crucial for quality strategy and decision making. ‘Slower pace/less urgency’ was associated with a reduction of stress and pressure. These responses are a reflection of individuals asking for a better work-life balance and overall use of time at work.

From the interviews there is a call from our interviewees for a new job structure model, moving away from one person full-time in one role at one location to a more flexible model of shared roles over shared timeframes and places. The interviewees also noted that even if businesses have moved to more agile and flexible working for some people, it was not a universal model for all personnel. There was a tension between the call for work life integration and work life separation.

“In the future we may be less concerned about free time as being a necessary evil. Now it’s in the interests of businesses (run by Baby Boomers) to convey the idea that working is a good thing, because they want their workers to work.” – University Lecturer

Figure 3: Breakdown of requirements for ‘time’ from “If you could change one thing…” survey question.
“All jobs should be flexible by default. It’s a change in mindset and gives people the confidence to ask for it.”
- Charity Executive

“It isn’t a work-life balance; that implies you have to almost have scales of justice, to be able to manage one against the other. It’s a work-life integration, where you can manage a productive and enjoyable job, as well as those responsibilities that ebb and flow within your home life, which are so impactful on the workplace.”
- Retail HR Executive

The only item that cropped up in terms of gender differences in the interviews was from females, who felt that they had to carry the majority of responsibility for caring for elderly relatives and/or young adult children and therefore needed employers to provide more flexibility in their working patterns.

“I am one of the first generations, I think, to still be looking after my kids, but now worrying about my elderly parents.”
- HR Executive

In the survey females regarded ‘personal time’ as their top priority in 8% of cases; males were at 6.4%; 20.1% of females selected ‘relationships with others’ compared to 17.9% of males, a statistically significant difference.

2. The Value of Baby Boomers

Baby Boomers are often the leaders of organizations. They are valued for their operational roles and achievements. This research highlights that they have other drivers and skills in their working lives, which are not so obvious and may not be valued to the same extent.

The themes from this section of the research encompass bias in recruitment and development, recognizing the value that experience adds and converting Baby Boomer value into a financial figure. The results below are derived from the interviews.

Bias in Recruitment and Development

Key findings

The key findings from the interviews are:

- Stereotyping of those over 50 as ‘old’ is common. It impacts recruitment and development and results in the reality of the workplace not being the same as the good intentions of organizations and governments
- A recruitment focus on recent achievements works against Baby Boomers.
Our interviews highlighted a common covert bias towards not recruiting older workers combined with a focus on recent achievements rather than considering overall experience. This is an area where HR practice does not match HR intent. Typical comments include:

"Looking at unconscious bias, we tend to focus on race and gender and disability. It might be appropriate to add age to the list." - UK Consultant

"Stereotypes of older workers could be quite damaging to peoples’ prospects. We hear from people who think they’re the victim of discrimination, and whether it’s in relation to being made redundant, or being denied a promotion, or a pay rise. Those kinds of things chip away at people.” - Charity Manager

"If I’m applying for a job and I’m filling in a form, it asks: ‘What have you done in the last three years?’ I’ve got 40 years of experience to draw upon, so lots of material, but it goes back to what I did in 1978. Whatever I did in the last three years builds upon prior experience, to be where I am now.” - HR Consultant

Recent statistics reveal that companies are being held back by lack of training in older workers. In this project, in addition to recruitment, the interviewees felt that development opportunities and design showed a lack of understanding of their needs and of prior experience. The corporate workers were particularly disenchanted with frequent repetitions of compliance-type training and generic management courses.

"I don’t know how many times we have been on health & safety training. I know the course off by heart. But can I get some of my team trained in real technical skills they need for the job?” - IT Manager

The interviewees were particularly vociferous at being denied access to training and development that they do desire. They mentioned a variety of subjects, but the most common areas were coaching skills and technical training. Other high priority items include being coached themselves in areas such as knowledge transfer and planning career moves.

"We struggle a little bit with recognizing and supporting talent and helping people improve their overall performance, which should be gender and age agnostic.” - Financial Services HR Executive

As in any population there is a variation in levels of ambition. Baby Boomers show a range of drives to progress, from those who are content to stay as they are, to those who see themselves moving higher or into new areas with increasing frequency as they age. Most do want to continue to develop, often in new areas, but feel hampered by a cultural and organizational assumption that they are not interested in progressing. A high level of frustration was expressed by interviewees on this point.

“There are some great people leaving my sector who’ve got so much to offer, but there’s no obvious way to use that skill base. They want to keep using skills they’ve got, but not in the old way, and they’re finding their way back in through different routes: trying to get on different boards, or being a School Governor. I think we need to be a bit more savvy about how we get them back, and how the business could benefit from (Baby Boomers).” - Chief Executive

“The value of experience is interesting, because you see in a lot of adverts that they are only interested in is what you’ve done in the last three or four years.” - Insurance Executive
Recognising the Value of Experience

Results and discussion

Potential and development are words associated with the young. With age comes expertise and credibility, yet the Baby Boomers we interviewed felt a lack of encouragement to grow. Many of the people we spoke to felt undervalued, simply because they were stable and performing in their current roles successfully.

There is an aspect of many Baby Boomer responsibilities which is poorly recognized in formal performance evaluation – knowledge sharing. The interviewees were consistent in seeking more visible support and rewards for those who share knowledge and develop others. As mentioned previously, 41% of Baby Boomers rank ‘giving back’ in their top 3 personal priorities.

“I don’t think experience is necessarily valued. It’s the short-term goals and it’s what needs to be delivered. You see turnover and we lose good people with a lot of experience.”

- Finance/Insurance Manager

“Do we do knowledge sharing and do we do knowledge management? In most organizations we might talk about it, but actually in practice, and the research backs it up, we don’t actually knowledge share very well at all.”

- HR Executive

When asking Baby Boomers what they felt they brought to the workplace, the most common answer was irrefutable: experience. When members of Gen Y were questioned in our previous research\(^\text{19}\) the most important skill they felt their leaders possessed, and the one Gen Y wanted to benefit from most – was experience.

Experience encompasses tacit interpersonal skills, practical skills and knowledge. The tacit skills and resulting behavior are often hard to define in a work context:

“It’s partly a question of being able to look at something pretty objectively. I don’t panic. Even if somebody collapses on the floor, I’m more likely to make sure that they aren’t connected to an electric cable, before I rush over and place my hand on their fevered brow. It’s not self-preservation. It’s making sure I can carry on helping.”

- Non-Executive Director

More experienced individuals also carry with them the benefit of hindsight, interdisciplinary knowledge, institutional memory and synthesizing skills. These abilities enable greater success when predicting outcomes during decision making processes and complement Gen Y’s known weaknesses in risk assessment, as shown in our Gen Y research\(^\text{19}\).

Key finding

The key finding from the interviews is that:

- Experience is undervalued in organizations.

“It’s down to individual attitude. Some people really ought to give up and get out of the way, and others still have a hell of a lot to offer, but it’s very much individual.”

- Independent Business Manager
Another less tangible but crucial benefit relating to effective team working, is the understanding of human relationships. One participant described how she is better able to work with difficult colleagues: “I’m not going to get quite so upset about some of the things that might happen, whereas somebody who’s younger might take it very personally.” – Personal Assistant

Financial Value

“Knowledge is arguably now an organization’s most valuable resource and with their experience Baby Boomers are crucial contributors. It has been stated that Fortune 500 companies lose $31.5 billion a year by failing to share knowledge effectively.

However, the interviews for this research demonstrate that Baby Boomers are struggling to convince others of their value outside standard delivery target metrics.

The interviewees in many different organizations told us of their frustration at not being able to sell the value of their experience, knowledge and professional networks.

Key findings

- Experience loss has a bottom-line impact on organizations, as do lack of engagement and motivation of Baby Boomers. These factors are rarely recognized as business critical
- Baby Boomers also have an increasing financial value in consumer design and spending
- In terms of engagement, Baby Boomers value people interaction over some other corporate financially measurable benefits
- Converting knowledge, motivation and employee needs into money is a challenge.

Knowledge is very important and completely ignored.” – Webinar participant

“I’m not going to get quite so upset about some of the things that might happen, whereas somebody who’s younger might take it very personally.” – Personal Assistant

“The youngest person in my team is 40. It’s ridiculous. There is a whole group of us who will be retiring at about the same time in 2 years from now – at different ages, because some have good pensions. And what is happening about replacing us? We are trying to get new younger people hired but are blocked by hiring restrictions. All that knowledge will go at once.” – International Program Manager

“Mentoring roles, people roles are much harder to put a value on. I think it disappears under the radar, being brutally honest.” – Law Partner

In some more in-depth discussions, the interviewees recognized that...
there are two main challenges. Firstly, data to support arguments is not widely accessible, although for the benefit of business practitioners some numbers are quoted in this document and available as a supplement in the Appendix. Also, constructing a financial cost-benefit analysis to justify the value of these less tangible skills is context sensitive, so numbers appropriate to one organization may not apply elsewhere. As one interviewee commented:

“If you've got older people in your business, the statistical probability of them having the answers to some of your business questions is increased by a factor of 'x' (varying by business and their age and tenure). We need to find 'x.'” - UK Consultant

Gallup estimates that actively disengaged employees cost the U.S. $450-550 billion in lost productivity per year. Figures for employee engagement vary considerably from 30% up to one measure at 61% globally.

Our interviewees mentioned events, benefits packages, wellbeing programs, coaching and employee feedback schemes as contributions that employers can make to increase the engagement of their staff. Yet from our interviews, it has become apparent that feeling more engaged and motivated at work was primarily down to the respect and care that colleagues show towards each other as people.

“If you like each other, and you have each other's back, you're really going to make a better product, whatever that product might be.” - Business Academic

“I think there is lip service being paid to (engagement) with wellness programs. It seems to be ‘We want to keep you fit and healthy and therefore you'll be more engaged and productive.’ But it's something more intangible than that. It's the way your co-workers treat you. The way your boss talks to you in the morning.” - US Academic

Baby Boomers are not only the fastest growing consumer group in the western population, but also the wealthiest. The Boston Consulting Group found less than 15% of firms have developed a business strategy focused on the older population. The Economist stated that only 31% of firms it surveyed had considered longevity when planning for sales and marketing. One explanation for this strategy is that young people tend to dominate the marketing industry. In this research the focus groups in particular developed conversations and opinions on Baby Boomers as consumers; according to our interviewees this wealthy and vendor-loyal generation is desperate for customer products and services to meet their needs. Several interviewees also commented that they felt Baby Boomers were highly skilled in being able to help improve sales reach.

“The younger ones come in with the digital expertise, but how does that look for the customer? I'm normally the go to person for ‘would this work for the customer?’”

- Financial Expert

Quoted in our interviews, a classic example of an organization tapping
into this need is Barclays Bank’s launch of its ‘Digital Eagles’ initiative, which has allowed tech-savvy employees to volunteer to help colleagues and customers with technology. Another well-known example is the product knowledge of salespeople at B&Q, a do-it-yourself outlet which employs many older people, mentioned by several interviewees:

“The reason you go to B&Q is you want to speak to somebody about, ‘How do I put that TV on that wall? You can Google it, but actually, it’s always nice to say, ‘Will these screws work, mate, or do I need this?” And they’re always so helpful.”

– Hospitality Manager

3. Context: Environmental Influences

Just as all Baby Boomers are not the same, work environments differ. The geographic culture has an impact on how Baby Boomers are perceived and treated at work. Apart from the corporate working culture (covered in the next section), business sectors differ in their culture and approach to work, influencing both the productivity and happiness of Baby Boomers.

The findings in this section come from both the survey and the interviews and are described in more detail below.

Key findings

- ‘Relationship with others’ was the overall top priority by business sector
- Business sector cultures make a difference to Baby Boomer priorities in life. The biggest gaps found were between the financial services and education sectors, in terms of ‘personal time’, ‘giving back’ and ‘exploration/curiosity’.

In the survey, four business sectors responded in sufficient numbers to produce data which could be analyzed in detail – hospitality, education, financial services and professional. Overall, there was agreement, with ‘relationships with others’ scoring as the top priority for all sectors apart from the professional sector where it came second. Looking at Baby Boomers only, ‘relationships with others’, ‘motivation’ and ‘health’ were the top 3 priorities (Table 2).
“I think academics are a little bit different from the general workforce. It is one of the few places where being older is not necessarily a drawback. Older teachers are more esteemed than younger teachers. But the students are going to have their own opinions about that!”

- US University Lecturer

Looking by generation, some clear trends emerge. For all business sectors ‘giving back’ becomes a higher priority as age increases (Figure 4), as does ‘health’. Conversely, ‘achievement’ decreases. ‘Motivation’ shows variation across the business sectors. It increases in the hospitality and professional sectors, but decreases with age in the education and finance sectors (Figure 5). Similarly, there are business sector variations in ‘exploration/curiosity’; it increases in priority slightly in education but decreases in the professional and hospitality sectors with age.

Table 2: Baby Boomer priorities by business sector, % selected as top 3 priority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Sector</th>
<th>Priority 1</th>
<th>Priority 2</th>
<th>Priority 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>Motivation (65%)</td>
<td>Health (65%)</td>
<td>Relationships with others (51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Giving back (58%)</td>
<td>Relationships with others (54%)</td>
<td>Motivation (44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Health (64%)</td>
<td>Relationships with others (59%)</td>
<td>Motivation (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Relationships with others (57%)</td>
<td>Health (56%)</td>
<td>Motivation (52%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: ‘Giving back’ by business sector – comparing Gen Y and Baby Boomers
Results and discussion

Irrespective of generation, the education and financial sectors showed the most statistical difference between sectors. Three areas with large differences stand out – ‘personal time’ (26% of Baby Boomers chose it as a priority in education to 39% in the finance sector); ‘giving back’ (58% to 31%); and ‘exploration/curiosity’ (40% to 26%).

The interview data backs up the statistical findings. According to the interviewees, the culture of individual business sectors has an impact, both positive and negative, on how senior staff are viewed. The higher education sector definitely values Baby Boomers.

“You are doing something for society as a whole, not for the profits of one business. People are working together in a collaborative way, so it’s a very supportive environment. I think that’s one of the things that has definitely kept me very positive about the Civil Service.”
- UK Civil Servant

Motivation by Age by Business Sector

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Professional sector areas such as banking, law and medicine with strong hours-driven cultures, may be slower to see value in flexibility in working and encouraging efforts put into non-core activities.

“in law firms we’re very driven by hours and billing and there’s almost no value to anything else.”
- UK Law Partner

Some interviewees claimed that they were in roles that made them feel good about their contribution to society. The charity and local government sectors were particularly attractive to these people and the interviewees claimed they were willing to work differently, particularly in the later stages of their careers, in order to achieve their altruistic aims.

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- UAE Educationalist

Figure 5: ‘Motivation’ by business sector – comparing Gen Y and Baby Boomers
The global interviews indicate that geographic culture plays a part in how Baby Boomers react to their workplace. The participants described how variations in employment law and local working practices impact behavior, job satisfaction and attitude of Baby Boomers to their employers and to their own future.

In the US there is a strong imperative to work well into old age, driven largely by economic conditions, particularly the provision of healthcare. It was the compelling reason the US interviewees gave for working longer.

“Work is paramount in the US. We’ve long had this culture that we define ourselves by how hard we work.” - University Lecturer

### Key findings

- The Middle East/Asia has a stronger drive for extrinsic factors such as ‘achievement’ and ‘financial reward’. This area also has strong respect for experience, providing challenging jobs for expats.

- ‘Health’ is more important to North American and UK respondents. The work choices and roles for Baby Boomers in the US are driven both by a need to provide healthcare and by the work ethic.

“Equality law, and those aspects are providing the infrastructure that makes (HR change for older workers) legitimate. But how you change attitudes is going to be much more challenging.”  
- Middle East Expat Executive

The combination of statistical data from the survey and interview data demonstrate that geographical culture impacts the world of work for Baby Boomers. To illustrate, the key findings are described for two geographies.
Results and discussion

The interview information is reinforced by data from the survey which showed that for all age groups ‘health’ is considered a much higher priority for individuals in North America and the UK than in the rest of the world, with 53% selecting it in North America (Figure 6).

“If you took the burden of health insurance away from companies, then they would be far less inclined to fire somebody, just because they were older and costing them more. I think employment (in the US) is financially driven.” - University Educationalist

Our interviews confirmed that in some cases, a focus on healthcare means that older people may take on less challenging jobs, merely to provide an income and may struggle to be motivated.

“There are a lot of people my age who are underemployed, who were let go from very good jobs when the financial downturn happened. If you’re older, it’s harder to get employed. But can you go from being an Executive Vice President, doing investment banking, to working in a boutique?” - US Financial Services Interviewee

Interviews with expatriates, in several parts of the world, demonstrate that as a group they are more adventurous, flexible, more willing to accept change and more conscious of their own responsibility to manage their future, compared to members of their cohort who have had a more ‘traditional’ home career. The experience of Middle East expatriates is used as an illustration.

“In my opinion, there is always going to be space here for someone 50 to 60 and above, grey hair. They want the experience.” - Middle East Expat Engineer

![Health Priority by Region (all age groups)](image)
From our survey ‘achievement’ was a significantly higher priority for employees in the Middle East/Asia (62%) compared to the rest of the world (35% UK, 39% North America, 31% Europe), an element of culture that is important to take into account. However, achievement priority drops with age in all regions. Baby Boomers find it less important. This drop is especially noticeable in the Middle East and Asia (77% from Gen X to 29% in Baby Boomers – see Figure 7 below). This data may reflect the presence of ‘supportive Baby Boomer expats’ in the region, compared to other countries consisting mainly of locals.

Figure 7: Priority of achievement by generation by geographical region, top 3 selections
Results and discussion

There has been a traditional reverence in Eastern countries for older people, generating both respect and status, which in turn facilitates opportunities for coaching and mentoring, and for job roles which are primarily advisory. These are employment opportunities that the Baby Boomers in our research desire strongly.

“I think there’s a greater respect for older people across the Middle East. In the UK, I’d say it’s more negative – ‘you’re past it’ – and it is more competitive. Here, there’s an openness through a different contribution that can be made and an automatic respect that you should listen to what older people say.” - Middle East Expat HR Executive

“(In looking for contractors) the companies that are successful are the ones that realize they want experience and knowledge. There are some companies that just want degrees.” - Expat Engineer

Our interviewees in the Middle East were sensitive to the local culture, keen to fit in and aware of challenges that this life brings to both themselves and the local population as a new multicultural business world emerges. They could see a number of positive ways forward to make use of experience in enhancing business success.

“You don’t see old working Emiratis, (due to demographic changes). For our generation of expats, there’s much more scope for careers, because there’s a need for people to act in advisor capacities, to young, inexperienced people. We don’t necessarily want a career, but we’ll be happy to work alongside somebody, without their status. The younger people want status, so it works well.” - Middle East Expat

The interviewees pointed out that the expat experience provides less future stability. They recognize and accept that there may be a need for change, even late in life.

“Probably 60% or more of expats from here have to go back to their own country when they get older.” - Expat in Middle East

4. Context: Organizational Culture

The geographic and business sector cultures have a strong influence on Baby Boomers. At a more local level, our research found that the culture of the organization or work group has the largest impact on the way Baby Boomers perceive their work and how they feel motivated to perform.

The information for this section comes from the interviews only. The key themes discovered were an open and sharing culture, leadership and role modelling behavior, and a need to revisit the working culture in terms of a changing model of retirement.
Results and discussion

Learning and Sharing Culture

“The most successful organizations that we interviewed had a strong open, knowledge sharing culture which in turn reflected on Baby Boomers’ (and other generations’) happiness and engagement. In cultures where ‘knowledge is power’ individuals may be tempted to leverage knowledge for personal advantage, particularly in today’s economy:

“People don’t share knowledge, because at the end of the day it’s all about trying to secure my own tenure, my own place, my own image… particularly now, because we’re in a knowledge society. That’s what our currency is. Most of us sitting in this room don’t have mechanical skills, we’re not in the mechanical age. We sell our value as our own knowledge.” - UK HR Director

This stance often reflects the organizational culture as much as the individual. One individual in a blue chip organization described working towards a more collaborative culture:

“It’s really about behaviors and we’re doing quite a lot of work around working together as a team, a high performance culture, which is trying to get people to work more collaboratively in the company. Because we do spend quite a lot of our time on friendly fire, infighting, which a lot of big organizations do.” - Manufacturing Executive

Key finding

• The implementation of an open/sharing corporate culture and equal treatment of all employees are often hidden influences on Baby Boomer engagement at work.

In today’s fast-paced business world it is easy to move from one project to another without stopping for reflection. A frequent comment from the Baby Boomer interviewees was that their organizations too often ‘reinvented the wheel’. They described how the combination of a lack of post-implementation reviews with a high turnover of young people, as Generation Y looks for new pastures, means that there is less time to learn from experience and recalculate the value of actions. The Baby Boomer interviewees were keen to drive the culture to focus on lessons learned and previous experience. In those organizations where this was not happening frequently the interviewees cited the ‘blame’ culture as being the roadblock to success.

“Why do we just keep re-inventing the wheel of those ideas that have been tried, tested and failed? Why are we spending money on this?” - Consultant

“There are pockets of good practice and pockets of dreadful practice within my own company. I’m sure that’s the same everywhere else, but if you get a good leader there’s much more openness.” - Head of Executive Development
Previous Ashridge Executive Education research has discovered that business leaders often do not recognize that in their daily working lives they are role models for others. Baby Boomers in leadership roles need to be conscious of their impact on others, but equally all people over 50 can be perceived as strong role models. The interviewees for this project said that there were not enough role models of their own age whom they felt provided good examples for them to follow. The qualities they described in role models included an open and sharing behavior and demonstrating empathy for individuals around them as well as overcoming bias based on gender, age, part-time working and job content.

Examples mentioned in the interviews include a successful female at work who also manages to be a carer for elderly parents; someone who started up a new business offshoot in their 50s; an individual who manages a complex business area with staff all on part-time contracts; a successful transition to become a specialist consultant; and making a living by helping small enterprises or charitable organizations when over the age of 65.

Another aspect of culture which was highlighted in the interviews concerns fairness in the workplace. A culture of openness, trust and fair treatment provided the happiest and most productive Baby Boomers in our interviews and survey – across all business sectors, size of organization and nature of the work – from manual to knowledge-based.

The words ‘fair’ and ‘consistent’ came up frequently in the interviews. When interviewees felt that the organization was not treating them in this way, their motivation levels dropped considerably – to the detriment not only of...
themselves, but of all their work colleagues around them. The overall message was not that Baby Boomers felt they needed special treatment, but that rules should be applied fairly and that common sense and human compassion should be used in making HR-based decisions.

“It affects your motivation when you see how the firm has dealt with colleagues in a difficult situation.” - Professional Employee

“As long as they think they are treated fairly, they will share their experience and try to mentor people. Older people have both the experience and the capacity to use that to the benefit of the company, if they choose to do so.” - US Consultant

The interviewees commented on how they felt more motivated and were given a psychological boost if the work environment put a strong value on experience. Many were seeking part-time, consultancy or voluntary work outside their employment, simply to be able to work in a place where they felt their experience could be utilized.

The interviewees also noted that another challenge for business leaders in terms of fairness to all age groups is based on comfort level. Where individuals have a good pension provision, such as final salary pensions in the UK, or whose work contribution is not overly reviewed because they are stable in their jobs, individuals may be content to ‘tread water’ and remain in their current roles as long as possible. This situation may be of danger to the organization, stifling new ideas, blocking progression of those lower down and, perhaps unconsciously, encouraging a lack of drive in individuals to do their best.

The Baby Boomers interviewed were conscious of this situation both in their work colleagues and with other acquaintances, and in some cases in themselves, but were open enough to admit that this area of culture was worth review and action. Several interviewees commented that this situation damaged the overall image of Baby Boomers at work.

“I think that there are a lot of people who are in a comfort zone and just want to work that last five years of their career and not have to work too hard. I don’t think it’s okay from an organizational perspective, but it’s hard to find people and say, ‘Hey, you’re not doing the best you can do.’” - US Consultant
The key findings from the interviews are:

• It is time to develop a new model of retirement
• A culture of support and recognition of value from age 50 to post-retirement benefits both individuals and organizations.

The term ‘retirement’ is vanishing. Many more people will work into older age and will shift job roles, but no longer go through a ‘hard stop’ retirement in their 50s and 60s. Yet the business world has not yet caught up to this fact. The interviewees in the project put forward a number of ideas for improvement, based on their observations of today’s working environment. Ongoing significant development of those over 50, new roles with equal status but different functions, as well as alumnus and consultancy or project-based contracts for recent leavers are still far from the norm in the corporate world. A flexible background workforce available to support varying business conditions has potential benefits for organizations and communities. Networking opportunities to share news, ideas, experiences and solutions to challenges could also be more common.

“Fine, take me out of my job to free it up for an up and coming person with fresh ideas, but don’t put me out on the scrapheap. I’ve got lots of experience, I’d like still to contribute and at the same time I’d like some security to do that.”
- Manager, International Conglomerate

Results and discussion

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Flexibility in work hours is available for some, usually based on post-maternity employment, but the sandwich generation in their 50s/60s catering for both parents and children is often not included. There is enormous scope for organizations to re-think their approach to Baby Boomers and come up with new strategies and tactics on how to make them even more productive:

“We said: ‘By all means step down; we’ve got a ready successor. But come and provide some mentoring and internal consultancy for a particular project that is going on.’ It is thinking creatively…and flexibly – it’s not black and white. It’s not you’re either working or you’re not. It’s having some flexible options around how can we best use those people.”
- International Executive

“Would I do it again? I would. I mean, if you’re having a period of time…if you’re going to take a break, I think the Right thing to do is take it. It’s a good break and you come back refreshed.”
- HR Manager, International Conglomerate

“If my boss said, in a year’s time: ‘Well, your successor’s there and you’ve been there eight years, time for a change, but how about working on this project or how about I guarantee you a certain number of days per year, consulting?’ Fantastic, that would be great, you’ve got your security and you’ve got interesting work. And they don’t lose my knowledge and skills.”
- UK HR Executive

Flexible work options are attractive for the sandwich generation, who are balancing careers and family responsibilities. Organizations that value the experience and dedication of Baby Boomers can benefit from flexible approaches that allow them to continue contributing to the company while maintaining a sense of security and relevance.
Results and discussion

Our first Baby Boomer report in 2015 found that people were reluctant to discuss retirement dates too early with HR or their line managers, through fear of how they could be treated in the future and concern about locking plans in concrete, when circumstances may change over time. These views were reinforced by the interviews in this part of the project. The interviewees noted three main causes of their reluctance to talk: the changing nature of the HR provision including outsourcing and fewer HR staff for support, a corporate view that over 50s are ‘old’ and implementation of rigid rules of employment.

Even though we’re HR consultants, nobody would go to our HR people. It’s dangerous. Who do you go to? The people that used to be assigned to us are gone. They have one person that you don’t know and there’s no relationship with them. In the old days I knew all the HR people. (My company) is truly interested in employee engagement, but I don’t feel it’s directed at the older employees.”
- US Information Expert

“I’d be the ideal job share partner for somebody with a young family, who wanted to have school holidays. I don’t want holidays when the kids are there. It’s not something you can say: ‘Here’s an idea’.

5. Drivers of Baby Boomer Behavior

The interview sessions were anonymous, allowing Baby Boomers to express their emotional reactions to the work environment and to verbalize the reasons behind their behaviour at work. This section explores the findings from those aspects of working life. The themes that emerged from the interviews concern fear of speaking out, lack of confidence, diminishing status, coping with changing business processes and finding the environment in which to both speak out and to listen.

Fear and loss of confidence

“I see a tendency, which involves people being scared of speaking out, fearing that they might lose their job.”
- Online Survey Respondent

Key findings

The key findings from the interviews concerning confidence and fear are:

• Face to face HR support has been eroded
• HR support lacks the ‘human’ element
• Baby Boomers recognize a reduction in certain skills and abilities
• Confidence at work is dropping in Baby Boomers
• Baby Boomers are not speaking out through fear of job loss.

Our first Baby Boomer report in 2015 found that people were reluctant to discuss retirement dates too early with HR or their line managers, through fear of how they could be treated in the future and concern about locking plans in concrete, when circumstances may change over time. These views were reinforced by the interviews in this part of the project. The interviewees noted three main causes of their reluctance to talk: the changing nature of the HR provision including outsourcing and fewer HR staff for support, a corporate view that over 50s are ‘old’ and implementation of rigid rules of employment.

“Even though we’re HR consultants, nobody would go to our HR people. It’s dangerous. Who do you go to? The people that used to be assigned to us are gone. They have one person that you don’t know and there’s no relationship with them. In the old days I knew all the HR people. (My company) is truly interested in employee engagement, but I don’t feel it’s directed at the older employees.”
- US Information Expert

“I’d be the ideal job share partner for somebody with a young family, who wanted to have school holidays. I don’t want holidays when the kids are there. It’s not something you can say: ‘Here’s an idea’.

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I think it would just turn people right off:
‘Who is this old codger who doesn’t really want to work, by the sound of it?’”
- HR Consultant

“I won’t tell them my retirement date until the last minute.” - UK Interviewee

This group of interviewees understood that due to the rapidly changing work environment, their skills may be outdated. Both physical and mental capabilities may be declining in some areas and there was widespread reporting of fatigue amongst interviewees over 50. This cohort of employees is fully aware of health changes in themselves. However, they choose to not discuss health in the work environment, again citing fear of the implications.

Increases in those leaving their employers in their mid- to late fifties, reluctance to attend certain types of training, avoidance of projects where lack of skills/confidence may be exposed and general dejection were all mentioned by the Baby Boomer interviewees when discussing their levels of confidence.

“(Business) needs to change - not having such a macho style.” - HR Consultant

Results and discussion

In general Baby Boomers have worked their way up to a position of power, whether that is defined by job title, earnings or knowledge and skills. The interviewees confirmed that they usually defined themselves by their job and some felt that their whole status was linked to their work. To move from a position of full time employment to one of retirement is therefore a challenge.

“You’re going through life, and then you suddenly feel you’re slightly more in the shadows.” - Catering Executive

Status and Perceived Value

“The fear and lack of confidence in Baby Boomers is also driven by how they see themselves in a work context.

Key findings

The key findings from the interviews are summarized as:

- Baby Boomers define themselves (and their status in life) by their job position
- Planning for retirement events do not spend enough time on emotional implications
- Baby Boomers want a slower exit to retirement to allow adjustment to status.

“If only businesses were to say: ‘We want to make it easier for you, we want to get the best out of you, and we want to invest in you still.’ It’s a strategic thing… it would make a huge difference to companies to embrace their ageing workforce.”
- Public Sector Manager

The fear and lack of confidence in Baby Boomers is also driven by how they see themselves in a work context.
Confirming the findings from our previous Baby Boomer report\(^{30}\), the interviewees gave a variety of responses concerning retirement transition from feeling a need for strong guidance to those who felt they were in control and embraced the change. A common desire was for a gradual transition from full-time high-pressure work to full retirement over many years, rather than following the previous retirement model of reaching a certain age and stopping suddenly. This change to the employment model with an extended working life is a new concept to many of the Baby Boomer interviewees and they voiced that they would like support in this transition; they wanted to achieve it with a sense of self-worth and value, helping with the confidence issues described above. They wanted a positive career transition such as moving sideways, diversifying into multiple smaller jobs, reducing hours or advising others, not to be seen as a demotion, but a respected position.

From the interviews, some examples of retaining status cite the use of ex-employees with specialist skills as contractors to provide knowledge and experience ‘post retirement’. Another approach comes from the action of capturing experience from existing Baby Boomer employees:

> “Companies like Caterpillar and John Deere interview their seasoned professionals about real life management, because they don’t want to lose the knowledge; they put it on tape. So, that tells me they value them, because that’s how they’re going to train the younger generation.”

- Corporate Information Expert

The Baby Boomer interviewees reported a mixed reaction to ‘planning for retirement’ training courses. Interviewees did admit that in some cases, this may be an avoidance of acknowledgement of an approaching new phase in life. In general though, the interviewees felt that such education spent too much time talking about the financial aspects of retiring, which although a very important part of the package, was not what they felt they might need. They voiced a need for coaching and support in terms of the psychological change, of getting back into a world of building new networks and managing time differently. They wanted to find out how they could retain a sense of place and status in a new environment.
Adaptation to a Changing Working World

“‘You might be seen as a bit of a dinosaur when it comes to being able to find things on the internet, but that doesn’t mean that everything that you know is irrelevant.’”
- Senior Executive

Baby Boomers recognize that the working world has changed since they started work and especially in the last 10 years.

Key findings

The interviews produced the following key findings:

- There are variations in Baby Boomer approaches to new technologies
- Some Baby Boomers reinforce stereotypes about age and technology skills
- Baby Boomers recognize that they may need to improve communication when passing on experience.

Like all populations, Baby Boomers will vary. However, there was widespread awareness amongst our interviewees of a lack of personal knowledge and capability in social media. A small group embraced all new technologies with enthusiasm. Others felt an up-to-date knowledge was not required for their role or that the information could be accessed elsewhere, requiring less effort on their part to learn. Many felt somewhat confused and wanted more sympathetic explanation and training where appropriate.

It was apparent from our conversations with individuals that for a few, their own mind-set was actually limiting their potential:

“I hear people say: ‘Oh, I don’t do computers’ and I want to say: ‘You’re not still cooking over an open fire, you’ve got a microwave oven’. We don’t do ourselves any favors by almost reinforcing the stereotype that we’re not able to move forward with technology. For whatever reason, we believe our own myth that we’re not capable.”
- UK Manager

The interviewees considered themselves knowledge and experience rich. However, particularly in the focus group interviews, many of them recognized that due to change in communication styles at work, there are challenges in how they come across to younger employees when offering their experience. A “been there, done that” attitude is not well-received and there was acknowledgement that a focus in how to communicate prior knowledge successfully was an area for additional practice and development.

“I think it’s trying to make sure that we share those views with others, but in the right way. So it’s not ‘We’ve done this before, it didn’t work’, but instead, you can challenge from a position of strength.”
- UK Civil Servant

One person voiced that adaptation was in control of the Baby Boomers themselves:

“Put yourself forward for things, and don’t think old. If you don’t think old, you don’t behave old, and then people don’t think you’re old, because they see something different.”
- Social Non-Profit Organization Employee
Results and discussion

The Baby Boomer interviewees described their ambitions, yet felt that their career aspirations were not recognized fully. A consistent message was that there was an assumption that maintaining the status quo was fine because they were performing well in their roles. Many of the interviewees would appreciate a chance for deeper, honest discussions:

“In many cases people just drift along. We’ve had a couple of people who are successful, who at 50 suddenly say: ‘I don’t want to be here anymore. I’m going to go do something else’. People are tearing their hair out and gnashing their teeth: ‘How could this have happened?’ But actually, if you’d had some decent conversations earlier, you’d have either known it was likely to happen or you could have addressed it in some way. Maybe they actually just wanted to do something different in the firm.”
- Law Partner

The interviewees were particular vehement in their avoidance of having retirement discussions with their line managers or HR representatives. Some organizations we interviewed have solved the problem by bringing in external consultants, who can act as neutral listeners.

“Nobody should be surprised that at a certain age, there’s a sit down and: ‘Okay, let’s map this out. You’re having a really fantastically successful career. I can see you working like this for a certain period, but how long do you see yourself doing it?’ But people need to have that discussion with expertise, and I think that’s what’s lacking at the moment; they tend to happen in unfortunate rushes at a particular stage because of the need to make some changes.”
- UK Law Firm Partner

A common plea from the interviewees was that they wanted to be treated as individuals and for others to listen and understand rather than assume their needs and wants.

“We’ve got some sites which have particular pockets of older people and we do find that sometimes change doesn’t land as we would like it to. So...we just have to work a bit harder with the communication to get people on side. It’s all about knowing the audience, and just understanding them a little bit more.”
- HR Executive

Key findings

The following key findings come from the interviews:

• Because they are performing well in current roles and not communicating needs, Baby Boomers may not be fulfilling their potential at work

• Baby Boomers want line managers/HR to listen to their thoughts on their future

• External help may be needed to have open conversations with Baby Boomers.

“People put labels on us: ‘You’re not aspiring’. I say: ‘No, we are aspiring, but we aspire to different things.’ People don’t really listen to what it is we’re aspiring for.”
- Baby Boomer Services Manager
The interviewees, across both focus groups and individual discussions, did recognize that unless Baby Boomers take the initiative to voice their needs, then the organization will not see a need to act.

“If you’re going to behave like dead wood then you are dead wood. Take responsibility for that.” - Government Employee

6. Working with Others

A clear message came from many of the interviewees in this project. Larger organizations believe they provide the right policies, processes, values and expectations of employees so that Baby Boomers can thrive. In reality, the system may need adjustment. This section covers the important themes of line manager overload in terms of devoting time to HR issues and making use of synergies between the generations at work. All the results and comments in this section arise from interview data.

Key findings

The interview data produced the following key findings:

- Line managers are overloaded and not focusing on the HR tasks within their remit, which affects Baby Boomers
- Line manager approach to individuals is inconsistent
- Hard evidence to justify Baby Boomer HR concerns is not being evaluated.

According to our interviewees, the biggest cause of lack of progress on maximizing potential and motivation in Baby Boomers is that line managers have an HR responsibility, which they usually struggle to fit it into their schedules and in some cases are not equipped to handle. The interviewees felt that HR needs were being pushed down the agenda.

There is, without a constant and local HR presence, an inconsistent approach to managing older workers. This situation was a common discussion in the focus groups. The interviewees cited time pressure on line managers and lack of discussion between managerial peers as key causes of failings in terms of consistent approaches to flexible working.
opportunities for changes in work roles, retirement discussions and benefits.

“My manager will let us (change working patterns), but her manager won’t. It’s demotivating.” - UK Interviewee

“Quite often, the management will be working flexibly, but they won’t be letting the people on the factory floor do the same. They will justify it with all kinds of stereotypes and reasons that we can probably all guess, but they won’t really think about it properly.” - Charity Manager

Driving change in business requires evidence. The interviewees also noted several areas such as appraisals, exit interviews, anonymous feedback and turnover statistics where lack of analysis is holding businesses back.

“There are many people leaving here in their 50s.” - UK Employee

“Nobody pays any attention to exit interviews. They just get shredded. Nobody wants to hear the message.” - Employee, UK Professional Firm

“I’m not sure why they even bother having these appraisals for people who’ve been here for so many years. Nothing happens.” - Professional Firm Employee

The key findings were obtained via the interviews and indicate the value of maximizing the potential of a multigenerational workforce.

Key findings

The findings are summarized as:

• Baby Boomers and Gen Y have similarities and differences at work but there are greater opportunities to make use of their strengths
• Baby Boomers want to coach and mentor younger people and work more closely with them
• Baby Boomers also want coaching themselves concerning transitions at work.

In our previous research, members of Generation Y came across as confident and outspoken compared to their older colleagues at work. However, through interviews we found that this was more of a learned communication style than a real underlying confidence. In contrast, Baby Boomers may be thought of as at the top of their game, having generally made their mark on the workplace and successful in their chosen career. Yet, just like Gen Y, members of the Baby Boomer generation question their own abilities. Our anonymous interviews demonstrate strongly that both groups feel they need to work harder to prove their worth in the workplace compared...
to those in the middle of the work population.  

The first ten years of starting work and the last ten years of finishing work are transition phases. They involve change and adaptation. New starters will need support for that change, but, from our interviews, less obvious to those responsible for HR that those transitioning out of work may need a similar level of support. Our previous research showed that Generation Y wanted coaching and mentoring from their leaders. This research confirms that Baby Boomers want it too, covering both career opportunities and changes in role and focus.

“A few years ago, I really looked forward to retirement. I couldn’t wait. As I get closer to it, I’m avoiding (thinking about) it. There is that uncertainty…” - US Participant

On the other hand, our interviewees enjoyed being involved in coaching/mentoring roles for other people; it was a part of the job that many found rewarding, satisfying and ultimately made them feel valued. It was an area many of them wanted to focus on over the age of 50. The sample quotes that follow highlight the value of this approach for all concerned.

“Within 12 to 18 months they (new starters) are totally different people. To have had a hand in giving somebody that opportunity and helping them to make the most of it, I’ve personally found really rewarding.” - Aeronautical Engineer

“Last year I was working with a team of 20-somethings from various nationalities. Very bright, young consultants. We became known as the Dream Team. My ability at using Excel or PowerPoint was so far off their ability, how quickly they work, that we decided it was better if I just didn’t touch the computer. What they didn’t have was any of the experience, or insight into organizational dynamics and how you get things done. We were bringing very different things into it and we built a very good relationship of trust and respect for each other. It could’ve been very difficult, because there could’ve been animosity and we could’ve been territorial. It was about building up a certain openness about me not becoming intimidated by their ability.” - International HR Consultant

Two way/reverse coaching and mentoring was evident from many of our participants’ experience, particularly when it came to technology. However benefits can occur in many areas:

“I get myself hyped up about different things. And young Hannah used to say: ‘Right, it’s time to let that go now,’ and she’s 18 and she’s saying to me: ‘You’ve done all you can with that.’ I go: ‘I know’. She says: ‘And you’re beating yourself up.’ I go: ‘I know’ and she says: ‘Well, you just need to have an early day today and forget about it.’” - Public Administration Employee

In addition to coaching, the interviewees mentioned job-sharing between Baby Boomer and Gen Y employees and mixed project teams as workplace examples which could be highly synergistic.

“I think there’s an awful lot to gain from having a diverse demographic in your workforce. Under-25s are bringing in new approaches to communications. The over 50s have got more life experience and the experience of what’s worked and what hasn’t. The mixture of that, when it works well, is absolutely brilliant.” - Housing Officer
Review and recommendations
This research has revealed a conscientious generation at work. Ranging in role from part-time warehouse workers to self-employed consultants and blue chip CEOs, the Baby Boomers have surprisingly consistent attitudes and beliefs concerning work - across multiple geographies, business sectors and company size. Yet, each person is an individual with their own needs and ambitions.

By the time they have reached their 50s the Baby Boomers have generally found their own working niche, based on the context of their background upbringing, experience, location, organizational culture and personal goals. However, the interviews and survey have revealed that this generation is nevertheless uncomfortable at work.

This is the first generation to experience a much-extended working life and the Baby Boomer participants commonly described how they felt somewhat knocked sideways by managing this third phase of their working lives. There is acknowledgement that young people in Generation Y are coming into the workplace with different needs and driving corporate change, but far less recognition that the whole world of older workers has shifted too. Baby Boomers are trying to adapt, but a key message from the current 50-70-year-olds in work is that this cohort wants more support for the transition.

The Baby Boomers we interviewed conformed to the stereotype of a hard-working, dedicated generation. Most have been brought up to be defined by their job. They are naturally driven to be high contributors at work. They feel there is so much more they can give to the workplace if allowed to make full use of their skills and if their experience is recognized. But they don’t want the same operational roles they have had for years; they want change. In our previous report, we found that many Baby Boomers wanted to move into totally new business leadership roles (19%) and more significantly, roles involving the development of others (46%).
This research confirmed that they are looking for sideways moves or additional, but different, responsibilities. They want to give and receive coaching and mentoring and for it to be recognized as a valuable part of their roles and work time. They feel frustrated that these talents are not valued in the workplace. They often still feel like 30 year olds, and want to be treated with the same opportunities they could have had at 30; Baby Boomers fill underutilized and under recognized.

At the same time Baby Boomers have more demands than their parents ever did in terms of care for those generations above and below them, as well as opportunities to participate in activities outside the workplace. The interviewees felt a real challenge in terms of time management in their lives as well as added levels of stress, which impacts on their own well-being and that of those around them\textsuperscript{34, 35}.

"We’re that sandwich generation, which is I think a really challenge in terms of the workplace. How do you manage everything?" - Retail Executive

Our Baby Boomers prioritize happiness, camaraderie and the interaction with people at work to keep them motivated and healthy. They do enjoy work and intend to continue. Many can articulate what they want, but are not sure how to make it happen. Some are in denial and cannot face thinking hard about their financial situation or a future without work colleagues. Some are not able to evaluate their own skillset critically to see if it is appropriate or valuable today. Some have not developed the networks and outside interests to sustain them in a part-time career or retirement. Others have a full plan mapped out. Overall, however, they are asking for a listening ear, help and support.

Perhaps surprisingly, we found that Baby Boomers are a silent generation concerning their future. In essence, this generation runs business today. They are happy to be vocal on work subjects but reluctant to discuss their personal needs. We discovered all sorts of reasons – bad experiences with HR, rigid corporate rules, inconsistency in treatment by line managers and the natural stoical ‘get on with it’ attitude with which they were brought up. They also feel a sense of diminishing physical and mental capabilities and have lost some confidence in the value of their skills and abilities in today’s technological world. Therefore there is a dilemma - they want change but are not campaigning to make it happen.

There is a real need for this issue to be tackled and for some pioneers to become much more visible as role models, to encourage the majority to follow on.
Both Baby Boomers and the business community are unprepared for the new working demographic; outdated practices and behaviors are causing challenges. In time, the work environment will embrace septuagenarians in fulfilling roles, but now is the time for a strategic review of the working environment of the over 50s.

The interviewees highlighted aspects for review such as different working patterns and job structures; a re-examination of the term ‘retirement’; reward systems; talent management and new careers for all. The Baby Boomers want the term ‘diversity’ to include, in a conscious but supportive way, an age component, in order to make people focus on the real needs of this generation. Other frequent requests are to elevate ‘people strategy’ in the minds of all leaders and to focus on human value, including finding ways of justifying change for what may be difficult areas to sell and ‘monetarize’. These elements are captured in two interview quotes:

“In today’s business world we may be chasing cost too much and not looking at value.” - Catering Executive

“...are the older people here the brand? Are we part of what they want?” - Senior UK Professional

Another important aspect raised by Baby Boomers concerned the fact that individual leadership behavior within the organization does not necessarily match corporate intent or policy. They highlighted the areas of recruitment and development in particular, but also the lack of an open and supportive culture. These are all areas which are worth review, possibly with unbiased external consultants.

A big discussion item centers around putting a ‘value’ on people and experience. If it needs to be justified financially, some key sources and statistics have been added in the Appendix for guidance. But can the value of experience sharing and coaching also be recognized and publicized without it having to be associated with the bottom-line? The Baby Boomer interviewees stress that it is now important to (re)consider people value at a strategic level.

Who owns responsibility for the change? The answer is that governments, organizations and individuals all have to play their part in driving an improved work environment for the over 50s.

Solutions to these challenges lie at many levels and many need coordinated efforts to achieve success. The real opportunities lie in larger organizations. The erosion of HR support capabilities, the pressure of business delivery and recent global financial challenges, have meant that the individual has become somewhat neglected recently. Our interviews show that there is willingness to drive change in this area, if organizations will...
Review and recommendations

“Dynamic working and being able to understand what that is for people of our age group is really important for line managers.”
- Financial Services Employee

listen to Baby Boomer proposals and meet them half way.

The key areas for large organizations are support/mentoring, flexibility in working, greater career opportunities and changing the culture.

“You recognize that actually the luxury of retiring at 60 isn’t there. We need to look at what we can do to keep that talent within our business, but support them as well with flexible working.”
- HR Executive

The majority of discussions with Baby Boomers concerning change at work covered flexible and agile working. They wanted variety and described desires to job share with younger people and to troubleshoot problems. Baby Boomers were also keen to be involved in community projects or consulting outside their normal sphere during work time, to increase networks, give back to the community and share experience. Baby Boomers want a portfolio career.

“When I was offered the chance of phased retirement, I decided I didn’t want to go down to 50%, because I wouldn’t be engaged sufficiently with my job. So, I opted for 25% off, which means I’m as engaged as I was when I was a full-timer and just less tired. If you encourage people to work flexibly, their outside life gets bigger, because they’ve got more time to do it, and that increases people’s engagement levels.”
- HR Manager

Alumni networks for ex-employees to share their experiences of retirement/self-employment was one area that our interviewees felt had yet to be exploited successfully in business.

“I think organizations aren’t necessarily that good at retaining connections with people who have moved on, who could be really valuable to them. I wonder whether more focus on that would help people thinking about transition and the firm thinking about what is beneficial.”
- UK Law Firm Partner

For small businesses, charities, educational institutions and new start-ups there are opportunities to link up with those in their 50s and 60s from large corporations – providing mutual benefit in the form of discussion, advice, challenges and new perspectives. It may also increase the motivation and experience of both groups. Business networks and non-executive directorships are other solutions to drive experience sharing and engagement of the over 50s.

“Baby Boomers tend to have a lot of experience in relationship building. We should be used as ‘ambassadors.’”
- Survey Respondent

Other groups - business networks, those in advisory, legal, financial and coaching businesses and governments – can help to work on these challenges that face us with a longer-living and longer-working population. There is a strong need for support and empathy, personally tailored advice and clear explanation of information.

“If the British Chambers of Commerce, or the CBI, or the Institute of Directors got their act together… to get people from the business world to share resources across smaller organizations. ‘This person does X for you, but you need Y. The other person can do Y, but we need X. Let’s do a swap. Let’s explore how those people can work together, job share, pairing up.’ But it’s all seen as ‘Oh, they’re competition’. It doesn’t
have to be alpha male time. Just work out that you can both survive if you both have more productive workforces.”
- UK Consultant

There are also opportunities for individuals. Many of the jobs that exist today were not available to Baby Boomers when they started work and enterprising individuals over 50 can create new businesses altogether, or new product/service lines within an existing business. They can reflect on their own strengths and areas for improvement and how those behaviors may be viewed by people with whom they work. They can listen actively and sympathetically to their Baby Boomer colleagues and work on solutions to challenges. Most importantly, individual Baby Boomers can also take the initiative to raise awareness, initiate discussions and push for change in their own working sphere. They can publicize good examples of role modelling, or make links to solutions that may exist in other business sectors or geographies.

In summary, there are opportunities at government, corporate and individual level to take a look at older workers and drive strategic change to allow Baby Boomers to thrive in the new work environment.

“We still want to learn. We still want to grow, but I don’t want to be the next MD. I’ve had a big job, thanks. But it doesn’t mean that I’m winding down.”
- Social Sector Employee

Recommendations

Below are some recommendations for action based on feedback from the participants in this research.

People
- Treat all people over 50 as individuals. Do not try to force fit one rule for all in terms of work-life needs.
- Be fair, not equal. Baby Boomers look to an organization to apply fair treatment to all. Recognize that over 50s are often in a place of great influence with their fellow workers, so fair and supportive actions have far-reaching impact.
- Listen to older employees when they voice their needs. Encourage free discussion and suggestions on ways forward. Ensure an open culture and environment where they feel comfortable to talk with no negative consequences. Baby Boomers don’t want a big fuss, but they do not want to be ignored.
• Review how consistently line managers are behaving towards their staff. Inconsistency is very visible within organizations and lowers engagement.

• Encourage line managers to show flexibility and understanding of pressures on ‘sandwich generation’ Baby Boomers.

HR Practice

• Review what may be HR policy compared to what actually happens in practice.

• Review the pressure put on line managers – is too much being expected of them? Is there room for a more people-centric HR consultant role within the organization or within a network of organizations?

• Think flexibly about ‘retirement’ over a longer period. Also encourage retirees to come back to the organization to help out – in sharing their experience or with a special skill.

• Do not set a retirement date in stone until nearer the date – allow flexibility on both sides for a final date – circumstances change.

• Implement flexible benefits within organizations – such as extended leave for ‘care’ – whether that is for maternity/paternity or elderly parent. Design benefits packages that allow staff to pick and choose benefits at different stages in their working lives.

• Explore new job formats, such as job shares inside or outside the organization – between those with different ages, family commitments, time requirements. Although costs are higher for two employees, productivity will also be higher.

• Root out unconscious bias in recruitment or job movements. Do not reject an older person because they are over-qualified or because of age. They may be looking for new challenges and are normally dedicated and hard working.

• Recognize that there are different needs from different demographic groups in the workforce.

Skills & Development

• Development should not stop for senior employees – continuous learning is important. Look at encouraging networks, job movements, coaching (both as giver and recipient), apprenticeships etc.

• Do not be judgmental about technical skills – some over 50s are less adept at newer IT initiatives and may take longer to train or to overcome their reluctance. They still learn just as well. They also provide other skills, which
may be equally as valuable. Look to find creative ways of achieving goals with mixed-skill groups supporting each other with different specialisms.

- **Create a development program for the over 50s**, based mainly on reviewing personal needs and status. Focus on coaching more than financial planning. Use neutral external help to get started.

- **Find opportunities to link Baby Boomers and Gen Y** in mixed teams for mutual benefit.

### Selling change/gathering data

- Look to **quantify** the benefits of softer initiatives that drive engagement and happiness in the organization. Gather evidence from anonymous feedback, open forums etc.

- **Develop financial models** which can be used to monetarize and reward experience and knowledge sharing.

- **Examine and act upon exit interviews, especially for those in their 50s** – why are people leaving the organization at this stage, when they have many more years to give in terms of work?

- **Find appropriate tools** and consulting to open up discussions on the future.

- **Publicize role models** in order to encourage others. Older employees are looking to see that the organization and individuals can be successful in new approaches to working, with examples drawn from within their own cohort.

- **Open minds to possibilities** – find and publicize new options for the over 50s that appeal to them – working with schools/charities, acting as a consultant to a small business, developing an advisory network, driving up retention in younger workers, educating, coaching, non-executive directorships. Seeing examples may stimulate time-poor employees to seek their own solutions, which broaden their interests and drive up workplace motivation.

- **Encourage role diversity** – to allow individuals to grow into a ‘retirement’ phase which may well mean working well into old age, but in a different role. Such mixed interests increase wellbeing and health for the individual.

- **Recognize and reward** – older employees feel pushed into the background at times. Small token recognition opportunities are as important to them as for young employees. Use suggestions and ideas from employees of all ages.

- **Value experience**.
Organization

• **Find the right balance between organizational and individual needs** in terms of role change in Baby Boomers. Where the individual is ambitious, make as active an effort as for a 30 year old to see if appropriate roles can be found. Where the individual does not want to change, discover underlying reasons, seek to encourage diversity in the current role or movement in a caring way.

• **Examine ageism in the organization** – both conscious and unconscious. Consider how ‘youth focused’ the organization is and what can be done to even it out.

• Work towards developing an **open and sharing culture**.

• **Develop your brand** as an organization that looks after its employees. A supportive company is highly attractive to Gen Y and Baby Boomers in today’s business world.

• **Review people strategy and practice** – now is the time.
Conclusion
Conclusion

“I don’t think it has occurred to people running businesses that this is an issue.”
- Executive Consultant

A Mercer report found that 84% of responding companies knew that they need to change in order to accommodate older workers and reap the benefits, but the findings from our research attest to the ‘knowing doing gap’. Where organizations have changed, we observed positive consequences, but many of the organizations we visited are yet to reach this stage. In the midst of today’s fast-paced work environment and rapidly changing workforce demographics, now is the time to take action.

“This Baby Boomer research has shown that HR policies, and more importantly, practice, need to be updated – ranging from recruitment to development and support. This generation should be listened to and to feel free to express their ambitions and needs. Each Baby Boomer needs to be treated as an individual and also needs to focus on their own future and how they can make it as successful as possible in conjunction with employers, networks of contacts, and family and friends. Baby Boomers run organizations; they need to reflect on how to run them to the benefit of their own generation as well as those of the future.

Next Steps

The information gathered from this project will be used to further develop the generational priorities model used as a basis for the survey questions. It can be used by working people of all ages and the aim is to use the research findings to date as a benchmark comparison in the new tool. Within this project the model has been found to stimulate thoughts in Baby Boomers about their future and priorities and to act as an icebreaker to start conversations about new directions. Please contact grace.brown@ashridge.hult.edu for more details.
1. Demographic Summary

The following tables summarize the demographic data for the survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-35</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-49</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>43.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>94.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>51.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>88.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and Food services</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative and Support service activities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Entertainment and Recreation</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, Gas, Oil, Air conditioning</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial and Insurance</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Agency, Public administration and Defence</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human health and Social work</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT, Communications, Media PR and Marketing</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and Quarrying</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Scientific and Technical activities</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real estate activities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third sector/Charity</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and Storage</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water supply, Sewerage, Waste management</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale and Retail trade</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>94.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Only sectors with large enough sample sizes were used in sector comparative analysis: Accommodation and Food Services; Education; Financial and Insurance; and Professional Scientific and Technical Activities
Appendix

2. Summary of External Statistics on Human Financial Value

The following content is a summary of information from various sources that reinforce the monetary value of Baby Boomers at work. It may be of use to practitioners within their own organizations when working to justify strategic change.

### The value of experience

Research from Oxford Economics has found that it costs £30,614 to replace an established employee. This in part based on the assertion that it can take up to 8 months for a new employee to get up to speed. The time and subsequently cost will be higher depending on the level of the leaver’s experience. It follows that the loss of a more experienced employee will cost a company far more than the loss of one less experienced.

Existing research from the work of researchers such as Droege & Hoobler, the CIPD and Shah & Ahmad points to several bottom-line impacts of organizational knowledge loss, including: reduced organizational output, decreased productivity and lost organizational memory. Research from Jelenic shows that implementing knowledge management processes has multiple benefits including improved commitment of employees.

The OECD states that within a competitive market: “the opportunity and capability to access and join knowledge and learning intensive relations determines the socio-
economic position of individuals and firms. One example of collective knowledge loss comes from Boeing, the aerospace manufacturers. After offering early retirement to 9000 senior employees during a downturn, a rush of new airplane orders left the company severely lacking in skills. This led to the eventual shut down of production for over three weeks, and a $1.6 billion charge against earnings.

The value of engagement

70% of US workers are not engaged according to Gallup in April 2013. Engaged employees:

- perform 20% better than disengaged counterparts
- are 87% less likely to leave the organization than the disengaged
- have 50% fewer accidents.

Companies with highly engaged employees have 31% higher productivity. A 45% increase in employee productivity could be worth up to £340bn added output per year to the UK service sector alone, with a 28% increase worth some £212 billion.

Research conducted by McDonalds on 32,000 of its UK employees show that multigenerational teams were an average of 10 per cent happier than those working solely with their peer group. In addition, 84% of customers surveyed liked to see a mix of ages in a restaurant team; 60% expected customer service would improve as a result.

Recent CIPD research found that the over 55s scored highest in the workforce, 6.93 out of 10, when ranked on the attributes used to describe a talented employee and also came out as having the most positive attitude to work. They can contribute highly to team effectiveness, especially when working in mixed-generation teams.

The value of Baby Boomer spending

The 50+ demographic is the top consumer-age demographic in the world. In 2017 nearly half the US population will be 50+ and they will control 70% of disposable income.

Globally, the spending power of consumers age 60 and older will hit $15 trillion by the end of this decade, up from $8 trillion in 2010, according to research from Euromonitor.
References


14. See reference 12 - Don’t Put Baby Boomers in the Corner


19. See reference 18 - All 3 Ashridge Gen Y reports (Inside out, Great Expectations, Culture Shock)


24 https://www.bcg.com/


26 http://www.barclays.co.uk/DigitalEagles/P1242671738729


29 See reference 12 – Paine Schofield & Honore (Ashridge, 2015) Baby Boomers in the Corner

30 See reference 12- Paine Schofield & Honore (Ashridge, 2015) Baby Boomers in the Corner


33 See reference 12 – Paine Schofield & Honore (Ashridge, 2015) Baby Boomers in the Corner


50 US Census Bureau
